

REPORT OF THE INDIAN SANDHURST COMMITTEE

"Better an army of asses led by a lion, than an army of lions led by an ass."
—*Old Persian Proverb.*

1. THE Committee was appointed in June, 1925, to enquire and report :

(a) By what means it may be possible to improve upon the present supply of Indian candidates for the King's Commission both in regard to number and quality.

(b) Whether it is desirable and practicable to establish a military college in India to train Indians for the commissioned ranks of the Indian Army.

(c) If the answer to (b) is in the affirmative, how soon should the scheme be initiated, and what steps should be taken to carry it out.

(d) Whether, if a military college is established in India, it should supersede or be supplemented by Sandhurst and Woolwich so far as the training of Indians for the commissioned ranks of the Indian Army is concerned.

2. The Committee consisted of Lieut.-General Sir Andrew Skeen, Chief of the General Staff in India, as Chairman, one British member of the Indian Civil Service, twelve Indian gentlemen of position and authority, and as Secretary a Major in the Indian Army.

3. The Committee held their first meeting at Simla, on August 12, 1925.

A Sub-Committee visited educational institutions of all kinds in England, and toured France, Canada, and the United States. A second Sub-Committee visited the Indian Universities.

The final report was considered and passed early in 1926.

4. Before 1918 Indians were not eligible to hold the King's Commission—that is, the commission which is held by the British officer of the British and Indian Armies.

In 1905 a special form of King's Commission in His Majesty's native Indian land forces was instituted for those Indian gentlemen who passed successfully through the full course of the Imperial Cadet Corps, but this commission carried only the power of command over Indian troops, and the holders of it, as they could not rise above the position of company officers in a regimental unit, had no effective military career open to them.

In 1918 Indians were declared eligible on equal terms with British youths to receive the King's Commission in His Majesty's land forces,

which carried with it the power of command over British as well as Indian troops.

At present ten vacancies yearly are allotted to Indians at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst.

5. As a result of their deliberations the Committee recommended that :

“ The scope of the employment of Indians in the higher ranks of the Army in India should be greatly extended, and facilities should be provided in India to train them for the King's commissioned rank. A substantial and progressive scheme of Indianization should be adopted, and, subject to the present standard of efficiency being maintained, should be carried out.

Such a scheme should provide for

(a) Measures doubling the number of vacancies of Indians at Sandhurst until an Indian military college on the lines of Sandhurst is established.

(b) Indians should be eligible to be employed as King's commissioned officers in the artillery, engineers, signal, tank, and air arms of the Army in India.

(c) That in 1933 a military college with an establishment at the start of 100 cadets doing a three years' course should be created in India on the model of Sandhurst.

(d) That 20 vacancies should continue to be reserved for Indians at Sandhurst after the opening of the Indian Military College.

Under the scheme proposed half the total cadre of officers in the Indian Army should be Indians in 1952..

6. These, put briefly, are the main recommendations of the Committee, and the means to obtain these ends, which are carefully thought out and elaborated, include subsidiary recommendations regarding education, age limits, publicity, methods of examination and selection, guardianship of Sandhurst cadets, and grant of commissions to certain classes who do not obtain commissions via Sandhurst or the Indian Military College.

7. Having decided that an Indian military college is necessary, the proposals for its inception are as follows :

(a) In 1928 the number of vacancies for Indians at Sandhurst be increased from 10 to 20.

(b) A further increase of 4 vacancies at Sandhurst per annum up to 1933, making the total number of vacancies in that year 38.

(c) The establishment in 1933 of an Indian Sandhurst with capacity for 100 cadets, to which in that year and each of the following years 33 cadets are admitted for a three years' course of training.

(d) When the Indian Sandhurst is established, Indian boys, who prefer it, continue to be eligible for admission to Sandhurst ; but the number of vacancies at Sandhurst for Indians is then reduced to 20 per annum.

(e) The number of Indian boys admitted annually to the Indian Sandhurst increases by 12 every three years, and on the assumption that all cadets are successful, both at Sandhurst and the Indian Sandhurst, the number of Indians commissioned increase correspondingly until, in 1945, half the number of officers recruited annually for the Indian Army consists of Indians.

(f) By 1952 half the total cadre of officers in the Indian Army are Indians.

8. Shortly after follows a statement to which particular attention may be given. It runs: "We have not attempted to carry the scheme beyond the point at which 50 per cent. of the total cadre consists of Indians, and we make no recommendation as to what rates of recruitment of British and Indian officers respectively should be after that point has been reached. *Again, we do not attempt to forecast the time when it may be possible to dispense with the British element in the Indian Army. We also, for the present, assume, generally, the employment in India of a quota of British troops.*"

So now we know that the ultimate aim of the gentlemen composing the Indian Sandhurst Committee is the total elimination of British officers and men from the Imperial Army in India.

9. The Committee, having thus boldly stated their objective, then consider the details by which the objective may be obtained.

They begin by stating that the first term of reference—*i.e.*, "by what means it may be possible to improve upon the present supply of Indian candidates both in regard to number and quality"—implies that the number of Indian candidates who seek the King's Commission in the Indian Army, and possess the requisite qualifications for service in that capacity, is at present conspicuously small; the proposition so stated reflects a condition of affairs far from satisfactory, which might have been avoided, but which actually exists; that the profession opened to Indians by the decision of 1918 is unfamiliar and arduous; and that some special concessions will be necessary, at any rate in the first instance, to induce suitable candidates to come forward. The age limit has already been raised one year in order to compensate for the later educational development of the average Indian boy, due largely to his having to learn his lessons in a foreign language.

10. The present method of selecting candidates for Indian commissions is by selection, not by open competitive examination, special consideration being made for candidates from communities which furnish recruits—*i.e.*, from classes with a military tradition—these selected candidates being permitted to sit for the competitive entrance examination, which consists of a written test, a medical test, and an oral examination. On the combined results of the three tests the final selection is made by His Excellency the Viceroy for recommendation to the Secretary of State for India for admission to Sandhurst.

11. Since 1918, 83 vacancies at Sandhurst have been reserved for Indian cadets, and for these vacancies only 243 boys have competed in India, and 16 Indian boys educated in England have been admitted to Sandhurst. The percentage of failures passing out of Sandhurst is approximately 30 per cent., whilst that of British boys is approximately 3 per cent.

These figures speak for themselves, and the Committee consider that the system which exists today has resulted in failure. The system is defective and must be attacked.

The causes of failure are ascribed to the fact that until eight years ago Indians were wholly excluded from positions of high responsibility in the Army, that there is on the part of Indians great and widespread ignorance of the possibilities of a career in the higher ranks of the Army, and to this may be added defects in the educational system in India.

Whereas the British boy of seven or eight years of age proceeds to a preparatory school and thence to a public school where he receives an education in which a great deal of attention is paid to character training and assumption of authority, thereby developing the power of leadership and spirit of initiative, these advantages are not provided in the ordinary schools and colleges of India, and consequently the Indian boy is in present circumstances handicapped in a sphere where general aptitude for dealing with and controlling men are of equal importance with purely intellectual attainments.

To counteract these disabilities it is desirable that education should be commenced at an earlier age, and that methods of education should be reformed.

With which pious hope, knowing the product of Indian schools and colleges, cordial agreement can be given.

12. The Committee also advocate that the present method of selection should be radically altered, and recommend primarily, as a general principle, that the basis of selection should be wider, and the method of applying for permission to sit for the entrance examination should be as simple as possible. They propose to allow applicants to deal direct with a single authority at headquarters of the Government of India, which authority alone should have power to refuse permission to attend the examination. Any boy who has passed the matriculation or equivalent standard should be eligible to apply to sit for the entrance examination after forwarding a certificate from the headmaster of his school or college, or tutor, that he is educationally, socially, morally, and physically suitable to hold the King's Commission, the application to be backed by references to two gentlemen of position and standing who have known him for at least three years.

To anyone with any knowledge of India the value of this certificate can be accurately gauged.

The central authority would as a rule consult these two gentlemen or make such enquiries as it thinks fit. If the candidate be found *prima facie* suitable, he, after passing a military medical test in the vicinity of his home, is eligible to present himself for the entrance examination.

Before proceeding let us examine these tests—they boil down to a certificate that the applicant is educationally, socially, morally, and physically suitable to hold His Majesty's Commission as an officer and gentleman; and who is the judge of his suitability?—his schoolmaster, not necessarily the responsible head of a college of repute, but the headmaster of his school or even his tutor! The value of such a certificate is absurd; it is not worth discussion.

13. Having been permitted to attend, the entrance examination will consist of two parts: (a) a written test on the model of the existing entrance examination to Sandhurst; (b) an interview before a board consisting of two military officers of the Indian Army, one educationalist, one non-official member nominated by H.E. the Viceroy.

The final nomination to be made by H.E. the Viceroy on the combined result of these two tests.

The vacancies announced for competition should be allotted to the candidate standing highest in order of merit.

Though it is not stated clearly, it appears as if H.E. the Viceroy can disqualify such candidates as he may think unsuitable, although they may have passed the test of the written examination and of the interview. The reservation that the vacancies should be allotted to those standing highest seems unnecessary—to whom else should they be allotted?

14. Besides those candidates selected as above, a certain number of vacancies, not exceeding 20 per cent., should be reserved for candidates nominated by H.E. the Commander-in-Chief from amongst those who have qualified in the two tests but have not passed sufficiently high to secure one of the vacancies open to competition.

15. The Committee admit that under their proposals there is a possibility of the examination being swamped by obviously unsuitable competitors, and therefore they propose, as a preliminary, that the candidate should appear before a local advisory board in the vicinity of his own home, this board to consist of officials, non-officials, and military officers.

This board should have no power to reject a candidate, but should merely tell him and the central authority in writing whether they consider him suitable or unsuitable.

But even if the verdict of this preliminary board is adverse to the candidate he can ignore it and still pursue his application before the central authority; of what use, therefore, is this preliminary board? Any youth swelling with his own importance or urged on by the

ambition of his parents will ignore the preliminary verdict, and the central examinations will be swamped with obviously undesirable candidates backed by a pundit's certificate that he is educationally, socially, morally, and physically suitable to hold His Majesty's Commission.

16. Now follows a recommendation full of class prejudice and an attempt to oust the sons of the one class which can produce the boys likely to make good officers. "In saying that the basis of selection should be wide, we mean *inter alia* that the preference for soldiers' sons, as a class, which is the feature of the present system of selection, should in future become the exception rather than the rule."

And yet this very Committee, when discussing the reasons for the failure of the system existing today in regard to the recruitment of Indians as King's commissioned officers, acknowledge that "the root cause—plain to see—consists in the fact that until eight years ago Indians were wholly excluded from positions of high responsibility in the Army, and the potency of this cause will be at once appreciated when it is remembered that in the United Kingdom the great majority of Army officers are drawn from families with traditions of military service and military distinction extending through many generations."

They acknowledge that the majority of British officers are of the so-called military class, yet they would have the majority of the Indian officers drawn from the Indian classes which are not enlisted in the Indian Army at all. These have no tradition of military service of any kind, and yet this Committee propose that they should be given equal chances for commission in the Army with those who have natural and inherited martial instincts. And yet again in another place the Committee state: "It is not our purpose or design that the number of Indian King's commissioned officers in the Army should be increased without reference to considerations of efficiency; we recognize that there can be only one standard of efficiency—namely, the highest."

17. The Committee then consider the question of cost of education and training, and after comparing the expenses of a student at West Point, St. Cyr, and Kingston with that of a boy at Sandhurst, they recommend that the fees at an Indian military college should not exceed an amount which can be paid without hardships by parents of the class which will provide most of the cadets—the upper and middle classes. The rate fixed should include all expenses in connection with the college course.

Certain suggestions regarding scholarships are also put forward.

18. The Committee recommend the abolition of the "eight units system." They state that the main reason given them for the adoption of this scheme was a desire to provide a means of testing the worth of the Indian King's commissioned officers. In time of crisis, it is argued, it might be that if Indian officers were mixed with British officers any shortcomings they possessed might be concealed, whilst if

they were put to the test by themselves they would have to stand or fall by their own merits.

The Committee object to this system on the grounds that to confine Indian officers to these units is an invidious form of segregation, that Indians who now qualify have family connections with particular units, and it is natural and laudable that they should wish to continue the family traditions as in the case of British officers.

This last reason is one with which the British officer will readily agree, but the Committee continue and state that there are "objections of a more concrete character. In the first place the test as formulated by the authorities is, we think, an unfair one and too severe to impose upon the first generation of Indian King's commissioned officers who already have sufficient disadvantages of other kinds to overcome," which being put bluntly implies that the Committee do not think that the Indian officers should be put in a position where their capabilities may be properly tested. And this is the considered opinion of a body of Indian gentlemen of position and authority. It is to be hoped that they are unjust to their fellow-countrymen.

There is, however, another really practical reason why the "eight units system" cannot be continued, and that is, that when all the appointments of company officers in the eight units have been filled by Indians—and this at the present rate of progress will be the case in the next two years—no further Indian officers can be posted to these units except to replace an unexpected casualty, until the senior company officers qualify, by length of service and merit, for selection as company commanders. This will mean an interval of some years, during which even the present intake of Indian officers from Sandhurst would have to be posted to other Indian units.

19. *The Case for an Indian Sandhurst.*—It may be admitted that sufficient Indians cannot be educated at Sandhurst, as that institution cannot admit more than possibly 5 per cent. of Indians until the effect of these numbers on the personality of the institution has been tested by actual experience, and that being so it is clearly advisable that India should cease to rely solely on Sandhurst for the training of Indian officers, and therefore it is desirable that an Indian military college should be started now and be functioning fully rather than it should be improvised hastily when war makes the supply of trained officers in large numbers imperative.

This is a really sound and efficient reason for an Indian military college.

It is recommended that the course at the Indian military college should last three years, of which the first year should be devoted mainly to academic study and the last two years mainly to military training, in order to give the cadets who are drawn from the ordinary Indian schools a better opportunity of developing in character and physique, and also that the academic standard attainable at the end of

the course should be so framed as to secure specific recognition from the universities, and to enable cadets, who for one reason or another are found unfit for commissions in the Army, to continue their education at a university without interruption and on a level with their contemporaries in age.

Thus a boy, who may have been granted a scholarship at the Military College, finding the "profession thus opened to him to be unfamiliar and arduous," may at the end of three years' training gracefully retire and continue his education in a state of life less exacting and strenuous. It will be interesting to see how many of "those Indians who do not belong to the so-called martial class" will accept a commission at the end of their three years' training. This scheme of training at the Indian Military College is allowed to be defective in one important point—it does not provide, save to a very limited extent, for that association between British and Indian boys who are preparing for a career in the Indian Army, which is a valuable feature of the present system—and it is therefore recommended that to complete their preparation the Indian cadets, having been commissioned, should be attached to a cavalry or infantry unit in the United Kingdom for a period of one year.

And so now we have the young Indian King's commissioned officer fully trained and launched on his career, and he must be, to have stood the test, a man, to quote Lord Gough, of "go and guts." We wish him good luck and success in the finest profession a man can enter.

20. Having examined the details of the report, it can be undoubtedly described as comprehensive, carefully thought out, and, in most of its deductions, perfectly sound. The scheme, applied to a homogeneous and united nation, could be accepted and tried with every hope of a brilliant success—but is India a homogeneous and united nation? It is not a nation, but a conglomeration of warring tribes—it cannot be called united, as is shown by the bitterness of its racial and religious quarrels. Above all, is this class for which this scheme is particularly framed, this class with no military traditions, and which so far has shown no particular wish to enter the arduous and exacting profession of a soldier, likely to produce efficient officers?

It may be that the middle-class youth may come forward in sufficient numbers and of proper social, moral, and physical qualities to enter the Military College, but will he "stick it"? After the first enthusiasm has worn off, and the dull monotony of arduous training, combined with a strict discipline to which the Indian boy is utterly unaccustomed, begins to pall, only those who are real soldiers at heart will carry on to the end of the college course. Even after he has obtained his commission he is not free, his desires must be subordinated to the will of his seniors, he must keep himself continually and adequately physically fit, and he will find himself handicapped socially. However popular he may be among his brother officers, and however equally they may treat

him on the sports ground and in the mess, there will always be the social question. When one man's womenkind are debarred from social intercourse with the womenkind of his comrades, can there be equality of social intercourse? These difficulties may be overcome in time, but they are difficulties which will have to be faced by the first generation of King's Indian officers. Apart from these minor social inequalities, has the Indian the power to rule with just impartiality the intriguing and warring clans with which the Indian ranks are filled. During the War the writer was discussing this question of commissions to Indian officers with an Indian, the son of a distinguished Indian frontier soldier, who had himself attained high rank in the Civil Service, and who upheld that Indians should be given commissioned rank. He was asked "if, as the colonel of a battalion, he had to choose for promotion to non-commissioned rank between a man of his own clan and another tribesman who had a better claim what his selection would be." He replied unhesitatingly that his clansman would be selected—what other course was possible? otherwise he would lose the support of his clansmen. Until the Indian can learn that efficiency is the sole test for promotion he cannot hold the scales of justice equally.

The Indian may demand equal terms with British youths to secure the King's Commission, which carries with it the power of command over British as well as Indian troops. The power of command may be given, perhaps, but the power to command can only be obtained by character strengthened by training, and the Committee agrees that this power is wanting, that the Indian is handicapped especially in a sphere where physical consideration and genuine aptitude for dealing with and controlling men are of equal importance with purely intellectual considerations. The Committee themselves give as their objections to the present "eight units system" that the test of standing alone and being judged on their own merits is an unfair one, and too severe to impose upon the first generation of Indian officers. Will the second generation of the unmilitary classes be more efficient? And in the meantime is authority and power to command both British and Indian troops to be granted to inefficient? The Committee themselves recognize that in the Army there can only be one standard of efficiency—namely, the highest—and yet they propose that by 1952 half the total cadre of officers of the Indian Army shall be Indians, and these will be Indians of the first generation. The lives of soldiers cannot be jeopardized because an untried class of men think they may, in time, acquire the power to command and control men, even if not in the first generation, then perhaps in the second. The enemy will see to it that there is no second generation.

21. As stated, the scheme is good on paper, the only fault is that it is too hurried; the boys who will make good and efficient officers do not at present exist in sufficient numbers in the educated middle classes who do not belong to the so-called martial classes.

The Committee themselves acknowledge that in the United Kingdom the majority of officers are drawn from families with traditions of military service and military distinctions extending through many generations, and yet they propose to replace them with those who have no military traditions, who are handicapped from their earliest youth by the nature of their education, who have not had opportunities of acquiring training of character by means of games and the throwing of responsibility by school discipline on the shoulders of boys. This replacement is to be carried through so hurriedly, that within the next twenty-five years half the cadre of officers in the Indian Army will be Indians ; and though the Committee are modest enough to decline to prophesy the date by which the British officer can be eliminated entirely from the Indian Army, they even go further, and suggest that the time will come when even the use of British troops in India can be dispensed with. Have the proposers ever studied history? Have they pondered upon the result of the evacuation of Britain by the Roman legions and the disastrous result to the unwarlike British? What will be the position of Pandit Motilal Nehru and Mr. Sinnah as the last British soldier leaves Bombay. We know the opinion of a distinguished Rajput Maharajah, soldier and statesman. Will the Amir of Afghanistan restrain his clans because Captain K. K. Bannerjee, barrister-at-law, argues convincingly against the immorality of might versus right? Doubtless these gentlemen know that this disaster is unlikely to happen during their lives, and the scheme for "gold braid on the breeks" of their followers will secure them present votes which well outweigh future disasters.

You may tinker with the Civil Service and place inefficient in important posts. When they fail they only hurt their own reputations, and the result of their errors may in time be corrected or concealed. Not so with the Army : want of knowledge, lack of authority or stamina, and the resulting disaster cannot be concealed or evaded ; not only the commander is involved, but the lives of his men are sacrificed, and the country's freedom threatened.

Undoubtedly in India there are boys with military instincts and traditions who will make very fine officers after proper training, the sons of the fighting clans of the Punjab, or of the Rajput Thakurs : these are the classes from whom the future leaders of the Indian Army should be looked for, not from amongst the sons of successful barristers and merchants.

The time may come when the Indian youth of the middle class may come forward in sufficient numbers and be fit to command, but not now, and not for many years. The end of this century may see it, the next century should, but in the meantime the British Empire cannot be endangered to satisfy the political aspirations of the leaders of the National Indian Congress.